# Ten questions to ask your file gateway vendor

## Highlights

These 10 questions will help you determine if a vendor's offering will:

- Increase the reliability of your file transfers and the key processes they support

- Reduce the security exposure you have in moving key info inside and outside your organization

- Scale to support rapid growth in volume, size and number of connections

When you embark on a file gateway consolidation project, there are hundreds of questions you may have thought of, and many that may not have even occurred to you. It all depends on where you are in your Managed File Transfer journey. As the leader in Managed File Transfer (MFT) solutions, IBM has fielded many questions about file gateway consolidation over the years. That's why we want to share with you the 10 questions that you should be asking every vendor you evaluate.

These questions, while not comprehensive, will uncover some of the biggest challenges that cause many companies to switch to IBM after choosing another vendor. Usually that first choice makes obvious the complexities of MFT and illustrates why a strong multi-protocol, multi-process file gateway solution is needed. We think you should investigate all your options. Just make sure to ask these questions of any vendor you consider in your short list for a new consolidated file gateway solution.

### 1. How does your solution scale to handle increased volumes, simultaneous sessions and a growing number of connections?

While every solution can allow you to purchase additional copies of the product, how seamless is the management, setup and expansion as your loads increase? Where are the bottlenecks, as volumes go up in the processor, memory, or database? What has been tested and what configuration is required to support that?

While performance benchmarks are just representative, it is important for a vendor to have the information available to give you guidelines. As you think about how big is big enough, look at your historical volumes and examine new initiatives, like geographic expansion or new business strategies to project your volumes into the future. Realize that a new consolidated file gateway will need to last five to eight years before you can consider replacing it.

Because our solutions handle some of the most demanding workloads in the world, we think about, plan for and test our file gateway software to make it ready for your business needs. A technical performance paper is available for download **here**, which provides real world numbers on how IBM File Gateway performs.

## 2. How does your solution secure transfers beyond link encryption?

Because of the sensitive nature of files that are transferred via a File Gateway, security is a key issue. Everything from purchase orders to payment instructions needs to be secured. For most vendors, a security discussion centers on encrypting the transport layer with HTTPS, FTP/S or SFTP. While this is a necessary first step (one that all vendors should be able to do), it is not nearly enough for most enterprises.

Advanced security capabilities now focus on three key areas.

- Credentials: Making sure a connection is truly from a trusted partner, including things such as multifactor authentication, which means using multiple ways to validate a connection, like IP address, certificate, ID/password, and security token.
- DMZ traversal: Protecting the internal trusted zone from outside-initiated connections, including things like proxies, defense in depth deployments, closing all inbound transfer ports in the firewall, and anti-virus scanning.
- Defense at rest: Encrypting the data as it processed by the file gateway, including data-at-rest encryption.

At IBM, we continue to look for ways to improve the security for your enterprise.

## 3. What high availability (HA) options and configurations are available?

When you trust all your external file exchanges to one solution, it has to be highly available and resilient to many types of failures. Most vendors will support clustering to work with load balancers, but the difficulty is often with a central database. Even with HA options on the database, there are issues like maintenance, indexing, corruption and schema updates that require a recycle.

IBM innovation brings you closer to delivering an "always on" file gateway. **Advanced communications** can be an optional feature integrated within IBM File Gateway that creates an abstracted communication subsystem from the document processing. That way, if applications or back-end processes get disrupted by a planned or unplanned outage, your communications are still able to receive documents from trading partners.

Ask the tough questions when it comes to service level agreements, disaster recovery and high availability...because your internal and external partners will.

## 4. What applications, platforms, databases and infrastructure does your solution integrate with and run on?

Your organization has no doubt standardized on some common infrastructure items that you have developed expertise around that will be important to leverage. Make sure that your vendor supports your key infrastructure components. But don't fall into the trap of thinking that just because you have standardized on a particular database, you need look at that vendors' file gateway solutions first.

The biggest mistake that many firms make is getting a solution that locks them into one platform. This limits many future choices in infrastructure, even if it works today.

Most firms will want connectivity into other common services in their organization. Whether this includes directory services like LDAP/Active Directory, common infrastructure like data warehouses, message busses, reporting/analytics or problem ticketing systems, make sure you ask before you buy. If the vendor does not have pre-built support, make sure you evaluate the strength of the integration point's highlighted in question five as well as your expertise to build them yourself.

## 5. What integration points/APIs does your solution offer for extension?

Every solution will need to be extended, customized or integrated with something you have not even thought about yet. That's why it's important to investigate how committed a vendor is to opening ways to help you do this, both now and in the future. It is also important to determine how many extensions are prebuilt, versus coding on your own. Specifically, ask if they have:

- APIs for every function — ones that are available or discover-able in a library
- A way for users to share extensions they have built
- A partner community with expertise that's ready to build integrations and extensions for you
- Pre-built adapters to integrate with applications

IBM continues to advance its integration capabilities as demonstrated by the new RESTful APIs for IBM Control Center. For example, one IBM customer was experiencing such communication delays from China they built an inventory availability service through chat using the IBM platform.

## 6. What operational monitoring, reporting and visibility capabilities does your solution offer?

To provide an enterprise-wide consolidated service, a file gateway must give you the operational information to deliver higher levels of availability and service. While every solution gives you basic track and trace, the leaders provide advanced notifications, reporting and visibility capabilities.

IBM File Gateway provides a high level of integrated visibility in the base product, while also offering an optional monitoring and governance solution. IBM Control Center tracks the critical events across your B2B and managed file transfer (MFT) software for improved operations, customer service and B2B governance. It applies rules to alert key audiences when there is a problem with a server, process or transfer. Actionable dashboards are customized for various types of users, including operations staff, IT governance, risk and compliance (GRC) professionals, and line-of-business (LOB) customer service representatives.

## 7. How is onboarding and automation simplified, and can it be accomplished without IT coding?

The process of bringing on new connections is one that can be improved for most enterprises. The technical side of this onboarding involves definition, development, setup and testing, and for many, it is IT resource-intensive and takes weeks to accomplish. Every vendor will say they simplify this process, but the real issue is how.

- Is the simplification to a point where a non-IT resource can set up a connection?
- Is there still enough technical integration to change technical details if needed?
- What is the inventory of protocols that are handled out of the box?

These questions will give you a better indication of how much you can reduce the onboarding timeframe.

In the real world, everything is not as simple as in the demo. Trading partners and external connections do not always have the resources to set up the connection to your specification — many times, you are the one who has to accommodate them. IBM gives you templates and onboarding wizards to simplify the process as well as the power of a full integration platform for the more difficult connections. Customers have cut onboarding averages from weeks down to days.

## 8. What does the migration process look like for existing file transfer servers and end-points?

This is one of those things that it is better to think about before you start, rather than later. Sure, there will be changes you will have to make on the processes and servers on your side. But what will be required of your partners? Will they have a complicated change on their end? How will you migrate with minimal disruption, and how do you minimize the work they have to do?

At IBM, we have developed a new capability called dynamic routing that resides in our proxy product, so its sits between your trading partner connection and your file gateway server. It can dynamically route between your legacy system and your new one, without your trading partner ever having to change a thing. What this means for your migration is:

- Reduced cost for migration
- No "knife-edge" cutover
- Increased reliability of business processes
- Ability to fallback to legacy system if there is a problem

## 9. How does the solution increase the reliability of file transfers?

Since file gateways handle important information critical to transactional and business processes, when a transfer fails, a business process fails. Many of today's interoperable protocols (i.e. SFTP, FTP, FTPS) are great at working across different systems and enterprises, but they do nothing to address reliability. In research conducted by Vanson Bourne on behalf of IBM, the average failure rate for FTP was identified as 8%.

In addition to supporting standard protocols, IBM offers several different specialized protocols that can dramatically increase:

- The reliability of key file transfers through mechanisms like checkpoint restart, and automatic retry. (Connect:Direct solution overview)
- The speed of large file transfers over distance by using IP, not TCP/IP, options. (High-Speed option for Connect:Direct)

Of course, it does require your trading partner to implement the same protocol on their end, but in many cases, that's just what's needed to solve a tough file exchange problem.

## 10. What file exchange use cases does your solution handle out of the box?

File transfer use cases take many forms, and it's important to see how many are handled without coding by your target vendor. Some of the most common are:

- *System-to-system:* these need to be automated, many times use watch directories and require notifications to alert some-one when a transfer does not happen when expected. Transfor-mations like file renames, and encryption/deencryption are sometimes needed as well as protocol bridging to change the outside protocol to a different one for communication with an internal application
- *Person-to-system:* These depend on a user to send or pick up a file. This requires some form of user interface to navigate and initiate uploads and downloads. It can be as simple as the FTP command line, or it can extend to full portals accessible through a web browser.
- *Person-to-person:* These transfers are between two or more individuals, so the file gateway needs to offer additional security, reporting, and increased file size handling to be of value over standard email attachments.

There are endless varieties for each type of transfer, but it's a good idea to inventory where most of your traffic is and where you expect the growth. Make sure you have these high volume, critical-business-process supporting transfers covered. IBM can handle all of these use cases and more.

**IBM**®